

Northampton Community Preservation Committee Project Evaluation Criteria

To help the citizens of Northampton understand the Community Preservation Act, and especially to help potential applicants for CPA funds, the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has developed a set of project evaluation criteria. We want to emphasize that this is the first set of criteria the committee has developed. As we continue our work, undoubtedly the criteria will evolve.

In order to determine funding eligibility and prioritization, the (CPC) will evaluate all applications against these criteria, with the understanding that not all criteria will be appropriate for every project. It should be noted that all projects may not be funded, even if funds are available, and that in a given year some funds may be carried over to subsequent years for future projects.

These criteria are here to guide project applicants, not inhibit them from creative thinking. If an applicant comes up with a project that doesn't meet any of the criteria for a specific program area, but does meet a broad community preservation goal, the committee encourages its submission. (**Note: community preservation goals are in the process of being developed.**)

Community Preservation General Criteria

These General Criteria apply to all projects. High-priority projects will meet many of these criteria:

- Serve more than one CPA program area
- Contribute to the preservation of Northampton's unique character, boost the vitality of the community, and enhance the quality of life for its residents
- Address recommendations contained in the *Sustainable Northampton* comprehensive plan and/or the *Northampton Open Space and Recreation Plan*, or be consistent with other city-wide planning efforts that have received broad-based scrutiny and input and can demonstrate wide community support
- Save resources that would otherwise be threatened, or serve under-served populations
- Can be implemented expeditiously and within budget
- Demonstrate a high cost/benefit value
- Leverages additional public and/or private funds
- Receives endorsement by community groups, municipal boards and/or departments
- Demonstrate that other funding sources are not readily available
- Place high value on sustainable, ecologically responsible, energy-conserving structures, locations, and materials; demonstrate that the project minimizes the ecological footprint

Community Preservation Open Space Background Information and Criteria

The CPA law requires that a participating community "... shall spend, or set aside for later spending, not less than 10 percent of the annual revenues in the local Community Preservation Fund for open space, but not including land for recreational use..." Open space is defined to include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Agricultural land
- Well fields, aquifers, recharge areas, and other watershed lands
- Grasslands, fields, or forest lands
- Fresh and salt water marshes and other wetlands
- Ocean, river, stream, lake and pond frontage
- Beaches, dunes, and other coastal lands

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- Scenic vistas
- Land for wildlife habitat or biodiversity or nature preserves

With regard to permissible purposes for which CPA funds may be spent on open space, the Act specifically provides that CPA funds may be expended for “*... the acquisition, creation, and preservation of open space...and for the rehabilitation or restoration of such open space...that is acquired under the CPA.*”

Here are some examples of Open Space projects that may be carried out under the CPA:

Acquisition

- Purchase land to protect water supplies such as well fields, aquifers, recharge areas, and lake or reservoir frontage and other watershed lands

Creation

- Raze aging, vacant, municipally-owned building to create an open field
- Reconstruct a road to create a median strip with grass and trees
- Rehabilitate and/or redevelop brownfields such as capping a landfill and converting site to open space

Preservation

- Purchase permanent conservation or agricultural preservation restrictions to protect open space or farmland from future development
- Remove invasive plant species from ponds and wetlands to protect existing open space environment and wildlife habitats from harm or injury
- Purchase of easements to protect water supplies such as well fields, aquifers, recharge areas, and lake or reservoir frontage and other watershed lands

Rehabilitation and Restoration

- Restore natural areas such as wetlands or marshlands acquired using CPA funds to their original state
- Seed and plant trees and otherwise landscape an open space created by the removal of buildings on site.

These are the criteria which the CPC will consider in evaluating Open Space projects:

- Permanently protects important, unique or threatened plants, animals, habitat or corridors, including areas that are of significance for biodiversity
- Preserves Northampton’s rural and agricultural character, scenic views and community character defining views
- Provides opportunities for passive recreation and environmental education
- Provides connections with existing trails or potential trail linkages
- Preserves valuable surface water resources, including rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, buffer zones, vernal pools and riparian zones
- Protects aquifer recharge areas and drinking water quality and quantity
- Provides flood control/storage
- Preserves large strategic tracts of undeveloped land and parcels adjacent to existing permanently protected open space
- Provides valuable open space opportunities in urban neighborhoods

Community Preservation Historic Preservation Background Information & Criteria

With respect to the permissible purposes for which CPA funds may be used on historic resources, the Act requires that a participating community “*...shall spend, or set aside for later spending...not less than 10*

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percent of the annual revenues for historic resources.” A historic resource is defined to include a building, structure, vessel, or other real property that is either:

- Listed or eligible for listing on the State Register of Historic Places; or
- Determined by the local Historic Commission to be significant in the history, archeology, architecture, or culture of the city or town.

Note: In connection with historic preservation projects, communities should consult the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the rehabilitation of historic properties and cultural landscapes. These standards may be obtained from the website of Historic Massachusetts at www.historicmass.org. Please also contact the Massachusetts Historical Commission at: www.state.ma.us/sec/mhc.

With respect to the permissible purposes for which CPA funds may be used on historic resources, the Act was amended on July 18, 2002, to add language to the existing statute making it explicit that community preservation funds may be used to rehabilitate and restore municipally owned historic sites that were purchased prior to a community’s adoption of the CPA. Section 5(b) (2) of the Act, as amended, now reads that CPA funds may be spent or set aside “*...for the acquisition, preservation, rehabilitation and restoration of historic resources...*” Also, a new definition of rehabilitation has been inserted in Section 2 of the Act that defines rehabilitation as including handicapped access and other capital improvements that may be necessary for historic properties to meet federal and local building codes, or to make those sites functional for the intended use of the facility.

Here are some examples of Historic Preservation projects that may be carried out under the CPA:

Acquisition

- Acquire a historic site or landscape
- Provide a match for federal or state grants such as the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund

Preservation

- Purchase a preservation easement to protect façade or other historical features
- Restore historic buildings to reverse inappropriate alterations
- Establish or expand signage or markers at historic sites
- Conduct historical or archeological surveys necessary for a preservation project or creation of a new historic district
- Provide grants to acquire or preserve a historic property in private non profit ownership provided that City or Town acquires a preservation restriction to protect the public's investment

Rehabilitation and Restoration

- Restore or upgrade municipal historic resources such as town halls, libraries, town commons, parks, or cemeteries
- Adaptively reuse historic sites such as the upgrade and rehabilitation of fire houses, churches, mills, police stations, town halls, or schools for community housing or another municipal use
- Capital improvements to historic resources that are necessary to comply with state building codes
- Provide new utilities and other site work necessary for a preservation project
- Mitigate environmental contamination at historic sites
- Provide ADA and MAAB accessibility at historic sites, such as elevators, ramps, restrooms, etc
- Restore historic landscapes

These are the criteria which the CPC will consider in evaluating Historic Preservation projects:

- Protects, preserves, enhances, restores and/or rehabilitates properties, features or resources of historical significance

- Includes a focus on the historical function of a property or site
- Is within or eligible for a local, State or National Historic Register
- Demonstrates the ability to provide permanent protection for maintaining the historic resource
- Includes the granting of a permanent historic preservation restriction on the entire parcel to the City

Community Preservation Community Housing Background Information and Criteria

The Act requires that a participating community “...shall spend, or set aside for later spending, not less than 10 per cent of the annual revenues in the Community Preservation Fund for community housing.” Community housing is defined to include housing for persons or families earning up to 100% or less of the locality’s area-wide median income. However, for housing units created with CPA funds to be counted toward a community’s Chapter 40B affordable housing inventory, the units must serve those earning less than 80% of area median income.

The Act provides that community preservation funds may be expended for “... the creation, preservation, and support of community housing and for the rehabilitation or restoration of such ... community housing that is acquired or created”...under the Act. With respect to the permissible purposes for which CPA funds may be spent on community housing, the Act requires that wherever possible, preference be given to “... the adaptive reuse of existing buildings or construction of new buildings on previously developed sites.”

Here are some examples of Community Housing projects that may be carried out under the CPA:

Creation

- Convert existing non-residential properties to community housing (schools, mills, churches, office buildings, warehouses, etc)
- Create in-law apartments and other ancillary housing
- Acquire real property (land and/or buildings) for new housing development, both rental and homeownership
- Grant or loan funds for the creation of community housing to non-profit or for-profit parties
- Restore “brown fields” sites for housing or other mitigation of contaminated sites in preparation for housing development

Preservation

- Refinance “expiring use” properties which are at risk of going market rate
- Acquire a preservation restriction to limit the occupancy of certain units in a privately owned rental building to persons of low or moderate income housing

Support

- Modify existing homes, including accessibility improvements that allow the disabled or senior citizens to continue to live in their homes
- Provide a match for state Home Modifications funds to adapt the homes of elderly and disabled town residents, including the installation of such safety measures as ramps and bars
- Assist the local housing authority to support its low income rental properties
- Assist residents to meet homeownership costs, including grants or “soft second” loans to reduce mortgage interest rates, provide a down payment, assist with closing costs, security deposits, utility assistance, or to subsidize interest rates
- Use as a subsidy to write down interest rates for first-time homebuyer programs such as the Massachusetts Housing Partnership’s Soft Second Program or the state’s Self Help Program that has specific matching requirements; this subsidy makes the Soft Second Program the most affordable mortgage in the state

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- Underwrite a revolving loan fund or guarantee fund for tenants who cannot afford first month, last month, and security deposit
- Fund a housing trust or a housing authority to support a particular community housing initiative; income from an endowment for local affordable housing can be applied directly or matched with state or federal funding

Rehabilitation and Restoration of Community Housing Created Using CPA Funds

- Make site improvements such as water/sewer connections, well installation, septic installation or repair, or other underground utilities associated with the creation of affordable housing
- Rehabilitate or restore existing public or private property being converted to affordable housing units in a mixed income residential environment

These are the criteria which the CPC will consider in evaluating Community Housing projects:

Creates or preserves community housing – both rental and home ownership, with a focus that matches community needs for households

- Promotes and encourages use by diverse populations
- Provides housing that is harmonious in design and scale with the surrounding community
Intermingles affordable and market rate housing at levels that exceed state requirements
- Ensures long-term affordability, with a focus on:
 - Housing ownership affordability of at least 30 years
 - Housing rental affordability of at least 99 years
- Promotes the use of existing buildings or construction on previously-developed or City-owned sites
- Gives priority to local residents, City employees, and employees of local businesses while ensuring diverse populations
- Provides the city credit for units under M.G.L. Chapter 40B
- Provides services for underserved populations;
- Is LEED or Energy Star certified
- Enhances nonprofit capacity for providing housing and related services
- Provides mixed-use development opportunities
- Provides housing in locations that promote walking and discourage single-occupancy vehicle trips

Community Preservation Recreation Background Information and Criteria

Once a community has expended or reserved at least 10% of the annual funds generated by the CPA on each required use category (open space, historic preservation and community housing), the City or Town may use all or a portion of the remaining 70% for recreational purposes. Recreational use is defined to include active or passive recreational use, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Community gardens
- Trails
- Noncommercial youth and adult sports
- Parks, playgrounds, and athletic fields

The Act provides that CPA funds may be expended on “... the acquisition, creation, and preservation of land for recreation use ... and for rehabilitation or restoration of ... land for recreational use ...that is acquired or created” under the CPA.

Here are some examples of Recreation projects that may be carried out under the CPA:

Acquisition

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- Purchase of land to create new athletic fields for noncommercial youth and adult sports
- Purchase of existing, privately owned recreational facilities for municipal use, such as a tennis court

Creation

- Convert existing structures such as a railroad bed to a recreational use such as walking, biking, or inline skating trails
- Convert underutilized municipal lot to community gardens
- Clean up contaminated industrial site or cap landfills to create new soccer or baseball fields or playgrounds

Preservation

- Install an irrigation system at a public park to prevent the grass from dying or otherwise being harmed
- Install new drainage at an existing athletic field to prevent flooding and water damage
- Provide new drainage at an existing athletic field that has severely deteriorated; however, monies cannot be used for routine maintenance or capital improvement for which municipal funding has been already been committed

Rehabilitation and Restoration of Recreational Lands Acquired Using CPA Funds

- Create recreational opportunities through brownfields rehabilitation and/or redevelopment such as capping a landfill and establishing a new outdoor park, tennis courts or other athletic facilities on site
- Restore unused walking trails in forest land acquired with CPA funds to usable condition
- Resurface tennis courts created on municipally owned property

Note: The Act prohibits CPA funds from being used to acquire or create or preserve facilities for horse or dog racing, or land for a stadium, gymnasium, or similar structure.

These are the criteria which the CPC will consider in evaluating Recreation projects:

- Supports multiple active and passive recreation uses;
- Serves a significant number of residents;
- Expands the range of recreational opportunities available to Northampton residents of all ages
- Benefits conservation and recreation initiatives
- Maximizes the utility of land already owned by Northampton (e.g. school property)
- Promotes the creative use of railway and other corridors to create safe and healthful non-motorized transportation opportunities